



# STATE of the CITY 2023

Hello La Mesa, I'm Mayor Mark Arapostathis.  
I'm honored to deliver my second State of the City video.

The State of the City Address serves as an opportunity to celebrate our successes, acknowledge our challenges, and reinforce our commitment to deliver high-quality public services that enhance the quality of life for all. I invite you to reflect on the past and chart the course for our vibrant city's future.

## **Community Development**

After several years of efforts, the City's Housing Element was approved by the state's Housing and Community Development. The Housing Element provides policies, programs and actions that accommodate growth, produce opportunities for the development of new housing units, preserve existing housing stock, and more.

The City continues to enhance our permit processing. In 2023, nearly 2,000 permits were issued and more than 800 projects were completed. This data suggests progress as our city continues to evolve and expand to meet the needs of both our residents and businesses.

Construction officially started at 8181 Allison Avenue, a 100% affordable housing project with 147 units. This development reflects a significant step toward addressing affordable housing in the region.

Thanks to the City's Affordable Homes Density Bonus Program, in 2023, 48 units successfully underwent final inspection and are now occupied. Additionally, five ongoing construction projects are set to contribute a combined total of 271 units to La Mesa.



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Last year, we released the Accessory Dwelling Unit Guidebook, a valuable resource for those interested in expanding their housing options, and 49 accessory dwelling units and junior accessory dwelling units were completed.

### **Public Works**

Our City has made significant progress enhancing our infrastructure. In 2023, more than 540,000 square feet of streets were resurfaced. We plan to keep up the momentum and resurface 100 streets in the early part of this year.

As we continue our commitment to Vision Zero, the City has completed several traffic safety improvements, including upgrading 12 intersections citywide with modern equipment.

The City secured a \$500,000 California State Parks Grant for the School & Parks Mobility Access Improvements Project, focusing on enhancing sidewalks and bike lanes on Hoffman Avenue and Tower Street. Furthermore, in collaboration with the San Diego Metropolitan Transit Service (MTS) and Caltrans, the City received a Planning Grant Award to assess alternatives for the Downtown La Mesa Trolley Prioritization Project.

## **Community Services**

This past year, we completed renovations for the oldest park in our City, Collier Park. Improvements include a new playground, tennis and pickleball courts, picnic areas, and increased safety features. The City also celebrated the opening of the Fitness Plaza at La Mesita Park that includes exercise equipment for the community to use and enjoy.

The City also completed the Master Plan for Waite Park to create a welcoming neighborhood park that beautifies the area for children and families. The future 2.84-acre park will have a playground, dog run, an open lawn, a fitness zone, and more.

## **La Mesa Police Department**

The Police Department continues to advance in its efforts to foster community outreach, build strong partnerships, and enhance community engagement. In 2023, the department participated in over a dozen community engagement events including:

- The La Mesa Safety Fair
- Juneteenth Foundation Jubilee at MacArthur Park
- Citizen's Academy
- The La Mesa Safety Fair
- Helix High School Senior Presentations
- LGBTQIA+ Law Enforcement Summit
- Citizen's Academy
- National Night Out
- Coffee/Coco with a Cop



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- Kidzwatch
- Youth Leadership Camp
- DEA Prescription Drug Take Back Event
- Flag Day Parade
- Autism Awareness Patches

The Department proudly continues to promote women in law enforcement with 22% of the force consisting of female officers – a 2% increase from the previous year.

Enforcement of traffic laws is vital to the safety of our community and to continue these efforts, the Police Department secured a \$115,000 grant from the Office of Traffic Safety to support ongoing enforcement and education programs to help reduce the number of serious injuries and deaths on our roads.

Through 2023, the Homeless Outreach and Mobile Engagement program, also known as HOME, housed 42 people, interacted with more than 177 individuals, and handled more than 1,657 calls for service that would have otherwise been responded to by law enforcement.

This year, the HOME Team began providing Housing Navigation, assisting individuals to identify suitable units, pay for application fees, advocate to landlords, and provide financial assistance to cover move-in costs related to the rental unit.

The HOME Team has also started working closely with Second Chance, a non-profit that provides Job Readiness Training to clients who struggle with connecting to employment due to their homelessness status or involvement with the justice system.

The HOME program was budgeted for expansion, meaning two additional staff will be hired to increase our ability to connect with and offer services to unhoused individuals.

Chief Ray Sweeney continues to collaborate with the Community Police Oversight Board, resulting in the implementation of innovative policies, including a Mediation Policy, which was approved by the City Council in August. The policy's primary goal is to address and resolve community complaints against the department.

### **Heartland Fire and Rescue**

In 2023, Bent Koch officially assumed the role of Fire Chief for Heartland Fire & Rescue. Chief Koch brings extensive firefighting experience to his role, and we take pride in having him serve in this capacity.

Last year, our firefighters and paramedics responded to 7,742 emergencies and provided mutual aid for six fires, deploying 14 of our personnel.

Heartland Fire & Rescue's most recent new hire academy graduated in March 2023. A total of eight new firefighters attended the eight-week academy.

After a post-pandemic hiatus, Heartland Fire & Rescue welcomed back their 14th annual pancake breakfast fundraiser benefiting their explorer program. Close to 1,400 visitors attended the event at Fire Station 11 and personnel served more than 3,000 pancakes.

### **Climate Action Plan**

The City has continued implementing its adopted Climate Action Plan. This past year our Climate Action Plan team organized a series of events, including household hazardous waste collections, climate action workshops, and litter-free cleanups.

This year, the City will complete an update to the Climate Action Plan to ensure it continues to address our environmental goals. The City also collaborated with the San Diego Green Building Council to implement the Green Business Certification program, resulting in six La Mesa businesses receiving certification.

### **Communications**

Enhancing communication is a key focus for the City. Our bi-weekly newsletter, the City Manager Update, keeps everyone informed about current City events and projects. The Mayor's Minute video series offers quick updates on community-relevant subjects.

Our website remains the central hub for city-related updates and events. We've also ramped up our efforts on social media, increasing our Facebook reach by approximately 66% and our Instagram reach by more than 192%.

## **Businesses and Economic Development**

This year, 12 businesses completed exterior renovations to their businesses utilizing the City's **Façade and Property Improvement Grant Program**. This program uses \$500,000 of American Rescue Plan Act Federal stimulus funds to encourage property and business owners to renovate the appearance of commercial areas.

In 2023, four of our La Mesa Entrepreneurship Accelerator Program, or LEAP, entrepreneurs celebrated their grand openings. This program provides courses in financial planning, social media marketing, business and operations to assist business start-ups. Entrepreneurs who complete their coursework and open a business in La Mesa can receive up to \$20,000 in grants.

## **Special Events and Community Festivals**

Embracing the community spirit, the City takes pride in its ongoing commitment to host and celebrate an array of special events.

In early 2023, the La Mesa Youth Advisory Commission opened a 1992 time capsule, revealing insights into the community's history and aspirations of the past generation. A new time capsule capturing the essence of the 2020s and envisioning the world in 2050 was added.

Meanwhile, the Community Services Department hosted a variety of successful events, including the Flag Day Parade, Sundays at Six Summer Concerts, Movies in the Park, and the La Mesa Rocks Fundraiser.



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The City also helped celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the La Mesa Village Association's Farmer's Market, highlighting its significant impact on the local community. Lastly, the iconic La Mesa Oktoberfest marked its 50th Anniversary, evolving from a small street fair in the 1970s to a cherished tradition that serves as a social hub for reconnecting and creating lasting memories among friends and family.

In addition to all we've accomplished in 2023, we're excited about the coming year as we build upon our current successes. I want to express my sincere appreciation for the hard work and dedication of our City staff. Together, we have made La Mesa a better place to live, enjoy, and thrive.

As we look ahead in 2024, let us continue to invest in our community and work together to create an even brighter future for all La Mesans. Thank you.